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ABSTRACT

The Sam Houston State University Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa used a 32-item questionnaire to collect discrete data on early childhood programs in Texas. Also collected were individuals' impressions, attitudes, and readiness plans for early childhood program expansion. The survey was a response to legislative developments, particularly a 1990 Texas law providing for an optional 3-year-old program to serve disadvantaged children. Results of the survey are presented. Responses concern school district characteristics and respondents' professional positions, transportation and lunch programs, percentage of eligible children enrolled, funding for the 3-year-old program, school attendance and space, developmental play, parents' role in Texas's early childhood programs, teacher training and experience, and curriculum. Major findings are summarized. There was no difference between the responses of the total group of respondents and the Phi Delta Kappa subgroup. Results indicated that: (1) the movement for program expansion is viewed with mixed feelings; (2) a total of 43 percent of districts responding do not serve lunch to half-day students; (3) special assistance is needed if principals are to coordinate instructional and parenting programs; and (4) support monies will be needed if operational monies are provided. A copy of the questionnaire is included. (BC)

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A STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND PROGRAM READINESS IN THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AGES THREE THROUGH FIVE

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by

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CHAPTER 0191
PHI DELTA KAPPA
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HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS 77341

January, 1991

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A STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND PROGRAM READINESS IN THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AGES THREE THROUGH FIVE

Introduction

On June 27, 1990, the Sam Houston State University Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa received notice of a District III $500 grant to survey 1057 school districts in Texas. A thirty-two item questionnaire was prepared and mailed. Scantron Form 882 was used to record and return the answers for scoring. The data were scanned and reported using an 882 Scantron Scanner program on an IBM compatible November 29, 1990.

Survey Mailing and Return

Surveys were mailed to 1057 Texas school districts. A return of 580 questionnaires were scored. This was a return of 55 percent of the questionnaires. No follow-up or second mailout was attempted.

A second survey was mailed to the Sam Houston State University Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa. Fifty-one members returned this questionnaire. It was concluded that the results of the chapter mailing were not useful. This questionnaire was program specific and a large number of college and secondary school members in the chapter were not able to appropriately respond to the program specific questionnaire.

Questionnaire Overview

A thirty-two item questionnaire was used to collect discrete data to represent profile information on existing early childhood programs in Texas and to collect impressions, attitudes, and readiness plans for early childhood program expansion.

Early Childhood Legislative Movement

Because of the national interest in Head Start programs implemented in the mid-sixties, Texas started funding half-day kindergarten programs in public schools in

1969, and all districts were required to offer the programs by 1977. The 1980s marked a significant shift in public school attention toward the early years of children. In 1985, House Bill 72 added the option of funded full-day kindergartens, funded half-day four year-old programs and a funded half-day summer program for prekindergarten bilingual students.

On the federal scene, PL 94-142 was amended to require all eligible three year-olds in 1991 to be served by special education programs starting with their third birthday. Additional attention by President Bush and Congress suggests more early childhood legislation is likely in the decade of the '90s. Most likely this legislation will address latchkey (extended day and year-round programs), child care tax exemptions and industry incentives in this area.

Finally, in the summer of 1990, Texas passed Senate Bill 1. This legislation provided for the start of an optional three year-old program to serve disadvantaged children in Texas starting in 1991-1992. This signaled a major move to expand the public schools to serve boys and girls ages three through twenty-one unless this child is in a special category of special education. In that case, the schools are required by law to serve starting with the birth of the child (ie: blind, deaf, etc.).

Presentation of Survey Results

1. Question: PDK Membership
   - 42 percent of those responding were members of PDK.
   - 58 percent were non-PDK members.
2. Question: Service Center
   - 14 percent of those responding were in a district served by Region VI, Education Service Center. This is the home region of the Sam Houston State University PDK Chapter.
   - 86 percent of those responding were from other service center areas in Texas.

3. Question: Professional Position

   - 60 percent of those answering were superintendents.
   - 22 percent were non-superintendents in the central office.
   - 17 percent were other employees.

4. Question: District Size

   - 47 percent were from 1A-2A classification districts (high school <299 students).
   - 39 percent were from 3A-4A classification districts (high school <1469 students).
   - 14 percent were from 5A classification districts (high school >1469 students).

5. Question: Transportation

   - 42 percent thought all 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds should be excused from the two-mile walking rule and given free transportation.
   - 43 percent thought the two-mile rule should apply to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds.
   - 5 percent thought only 3- and 4- year-olds should be excused from the two-mile rule.
   - 10 percent were uncertain.

6. Question: Free Lunch

   - 57 percent currently offer free lunch to half-day early childhood students.
   - 36 percent do not.
   - 7 percent were uncertain.

7. Question: Percent of Eligible Enrolled

   - 29 percent of the districts have less than 50 percent of eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in their program.
   - 44 percent have more than 50 percent.
   - 28 percent were uncertain.

8. Question: Funds for 3-Year-Old Programs

   - 29 percent would seek state funds for a 3-year-old program if available.
   - 46 percent would not seek funds if it were optional.
   - 25 percent were uncertain.

9. Question: Compulsory Attendance Law

- 47 percent believe that age 5 is most appropriate.
- 39 percent believe ages 6-7 are most appropriate.
- 10 percent believe ages 3 or 4 are most appropriate.

10. Question: Appropriate Space

- 28 percent have space for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds in their districts.
- 70 percent do not have space in their buildings.
- 2 percent are uncertain.

11. Question: Current Program Location

- 72 percent currently house 4-year-olds in elementary schools.
- 1 percent are on junior high campuses.
- 26 percent are on separate campuses or other locations.

12. Question: Whole Day Versus Half-Day Programs

- 28 percent favor whole day programs.
- 63 percent favor half-day programs.
- 8 percent have no preference.

13. Question: Should Pre-K Be on a Separate Campus?

- 30 percent say yes.
- 53 percent say no.
- 16 percent have no preference.

14. Question: Are Pre-K Programs Instructionally Important?

- 66 percent say yes, they make a learning difference.
- 22 percent say no.
- 12 percent are uncertain.

15. Question: Developmental Play

- 90 percent believe developmental play is important.
- 5 percent say no.
- 5 percent are uncertain.

16. Question: Parent Partnership Program

    - 12 percent have a parent partnership program requirement for Pre-K or kindergarten.
    - 78 percent do not.
    - 10 percent are uncertain if they have a program.

17. Question: Parenting Program Responsibility

    - 5 percent have a coordinator for parenting.
    - 12 percent use Chapter I or special education staff to coordinate.
    - 43 percent use the principal.
    - 40 percent are unsure or use another staff position to coordinate.

18. Question: Printed Materials for Parents

    - 52 percent have printed materials for parents of their early childhood programs.
    - 41 percent have no printed materials.
    - 6 percent were uncertain.

19. Question: Maximum Pupil-Teacher Ratio for 3- or 4-Year-Old Children

    - 46 percent believe it should be less than 1:15.
    - 30 percent believe it should be 1:15.
    - 9 percent favor 1:18.
    - 10 percent voted for 1:22.
    - 9 percent were uncertain.

20. Question: Pupil-Teacher Ratio with an Aide Assisting

    - 18 percent favor less than 1:15.
    - 20 percent favor 1:15.
    - 17 percent favor 1:18.
    - 36 percent selected 1:22.
    - 9 percent were uncertain.

21. Question: Special Training for Teachers of 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Olds
    - 90 percent said yes, these teachers need special training.
    - 5 percent said no.
    - 5 percent were uncertain.
22. Question: Most Appropriate Training for Teachers
    - 7 percent believed that elementary training was sufficient.
    - 84 percent recommended elementary and early childhood training.
    - 6 percent recommended elementary and special education.
    - 1 percent recommended special education training only.
    - 2 percent were uncertain.
23. Question: Early Childhood Program Coordinators
    - 7 percent have an early childhood coordinator.
    - 17 percent use Chapter I or special education staff.
    - 55 percent use the principal.
    - 21 percent use other staff, or they are unsure who does it.
24. Question: Organization of Early Childhood Classrooms
    - 86 percent organize around learning centers.
    - 4 percent are traditional.
    - 9 percent are uncertain
25. Question: Special Substitute Teachers
    - 23 percent have special substitute teachers for early childhood classrooms.
    - 66 percent use regular substitute teachers.
    - 11 percent are uncertain if they do anything special.
26. Question: Pre-K Teacher Experience
    - 4 percent use first-year teachers teaching Pre-K students.
    - 28 percent use teachers with less than 5 years of experience.
    - 56 percent have teachers with more than 5 years of experience.
    - 11 percent are uncertain.

27. Question: Do you have an early childhood curriculum?
    - 67 percent said yes.
    - 18 percent said no.
    - 15 percent commented that the curriculum was in progress.
28. Question: Best Curriculum for Your District
    - 40 percent say that the curriculum was written by the district.
    - 7 percent state that a commercial curriculum is best.
    - 52 percent prefer a combination of written and commercial curricula.
29. Question: Pre-K or Kindergarten Graduation
    - 37 percent hold early childhood graduations.
    - 59 percent do not hold graduations.
    - 3 percent were uncertain.
30. Question: Most Important Characteristic for Early Childhood Teacher
    - 40 percent said "loves kids."
    - 22 percent said "patience."
    - 19 percent said "flexible."
    - 10 percent said "enthusiasm."
    - 9 percent said "creative."
31. Question: Should 3- and 4-year-olds be on a separate campus?
    - 13 percent said "yes."
    - 70 percent said "no."
    - 17 percent were uncertain.
32. Question: Developmental Play Most Nearly Resembles
    - 56 percent said children interacting in centers was developmental play.
    - 26 percent said teacher-directed games.
    - 11 percent said physical education classes.
    - 8 percent said recess.

Phi Delta Kappan Responses

When total group responses were compared to the PDK subgroup, there were no major differences in the response selections. One question varied by eight percentage points (Question 9) and one question by six percentage points (Question 32). In Question 9, Kappans favored ages 6-7 for compulsory attendance, and in question 32, Kappans more correctly identified the meaning of developmental play.

Summary of Major Findings

1. Kappans did not differ from non-Kappans in their views and programs for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds.
2. A majority of Texas districts do not favor, or they are undecided, on full transportations for 3-, 4-, 5-year-olds. The two-mile rule should not be set aside.
3. Approximately one-third of the Texas school districts serve less than 50 percent of eligible 4-year-old students in their district.
4. Almost half of the districts would not seek funds for a 3-year-old program if it were optional.
5. Seventy percent of the Texas districts responding report they do not have appropriate space for 3-, 4-, or 5-year-olds.
6. Seventy-two percent of the districts responding house their early childhood program in elementary schools.
7. Sixty-three percent favor half-day programs over whole day programs.
8. Only 30 percent of the districts believe Pre-K programs should be separate from other school programs. Fifty-three percent favor regular elementary campuses.
9. Developmental play was judged important by 90 percent of the districts responding.
10. Seventy-eight percent of the districts do not have a parent partnership program with their programs.

11. The principal is the primary coordinator for parent partnership programs in 43 percent of the districts reporting.
12. Only 52 percent of the districts reported having printed materials for parents.
13. Seventy-six percent of those responding favor a 1:15 or smaller pupil-teacher ratio for 3- and 4-year-olds.
14. Fifty-three percent favor a 1:18 or a 1:22 pupil teacher ratio if an aide is assigned to the teacher.
15. An overwhelming 90 percent favor special training for teachers of early childhood education.
16. The school principal was the educational childhood instructional coordinator in 55 percent of the districts reporting.
17. Eighty-six percent of the districts organize around learning centers.
18. Twenty-three percent of the districts maintain a special list of substitute teachers for early childhood grades.
19. Eighty-four percent of the districts reporting do not use first-year teachers in the early childhood program.
20. Early childhood graduation exercises are held in 37 percent of all school districts. (The researchers do not endorse the concept of the Pre-K and K graduation programs.)
21. The single most important characteristic for a teacher of 3-, 4-, or 5-year-olds was a "love of kids."
22. Seventy percent of all districts reporting do not want 3- and 4-year-olds on a separate campus.
23. Forty-four percent of those responding were unclear as to the meaning of developmental play.
24. Thirty-seven percent of the ;school districts responding do not offer the free lunch program to eligible half-day early childhood students.

Conclusions

The movement to expand the early childhood program to include three year-olds is viewed with mixed feelings by the Texas public schools. Most districts do not have space and seventy-one percent are uncertain they would apply for funds if the program were optional.

At the present time, forty-three percent of those districts reporting do not feed lunch to the half-day early childhood students. This is interesting in that it is assumed all are eligible for federal assistance and this likely represents an actual cash loss to the district.

As the state of Texas expands funding to include three year-olds in the public schools, special attention and assistance is needed for principals who will coordinate the instructional program and the parenting program.

In conclusion, operational funding is outracing the readiness of the public schools of Texas for three year-olds. If state operational monies are funded, support monies are needed for space, transportation, training and development of materials in the Texas public schools.

SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Division of Teacher Education
Huntsville, Texas 77341 (409) 294-1045

EARLY CHILDHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

The Division of Teacher Education at Sam Houston State University is collecting information on Early Childhood Education in Texas. This study includes three, four, and five year-olds in the Texas public schools. The study is funded by District III, Phi Delta Kappa.

We would appreciate very much your taking five minutes to complete this questionnaire. Answers will be confidential. Only group data will be reported.

Please return the Scantron answer sheet in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by October 15, 1990.

Respectfuly,

_____ Jerry C. McGee, Ed.D.
_____ Laverne Warner, Ph.D.
_____ David L. Henderson, Ed.D.

Return to:

Dr. Laverne Warner
Division of Teacher Education
Sam Houston State University
Huntsvile, Tx 77341
(409) 294-1141

Early Childhood Questionnaire

For the purpose of this questionnaire, early childhood education refers to children ages three through kindergarten.

Directions: Please take five minutes to answer the following questions. Individual responses will be confidential.

Record your answers on the attached **Scantron** by using a #2 pencil to mark the appropriate letter between the brackets.

Example: 1. [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] (in this example, b is marked)

1. Are you a member of Phi Delta Kappa?
   [a] Yes [b] No

2. Are you in a district served by the Region VI Education Service Center?
   [a] Yes [b] No

3. What is your current position?
   [a] Superintendent
   [b] Assistant Superintendent/Director/Coordinator
   [c] Board Chairman
   [d] Other

4. What is the size of your district? (use the classification of your largest high school)
   [a] 1A - 2A Classification
   [b] 3A - 4A Classification
   [c] 5A Classification

5. Should all three, four, and five year-olds be given freee transportation and excused from the two-mile transportation rule?
   [a] Yes [b] No [c] Only Three and Four Year-olds Excused [d] Uncertain

6. Do you offer a free lunch program for your half day early childhood program students?
   [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

7. What percent of your eligible Pre-K (4) four year-olds are enrolled in your Pre-K program (1990-1991)?
   [a] Less than 50% [b] More than 50% [c] Uncertain

8. Do you currently operate or plan to seek funds to operate a program for three year-olds in the next three years if this program is funded by the Legislature?
   [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

9. In your opinion, at what age should the compulsory attendance law be in effect?
   [a] 3 years of age
   [b] 4 years of age
   [c] 5 years of age
   [d] 6-7 years of age
   [e] Uncertain

10. Do you currently have appropriate space in your elementary schools for early childhood classes (3, 4, and 5 year-olds)?
   [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

11. At the present time, where are the prekindergarten children (3 and 4 year-olds) housed in your district?
    [a] Elementary Campus
    [b] Junior High Campus
    [c] High School Campus
    [d] Separate Campus
    [e] Other

12. In your opinion, should programs for early childhood children be whole-day or half-day in length?
    [a] Whole Day [b] Half Day [c] No preference

13. Should Pre-K be separated from other school programs?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] No Preference

14. Are Pre-K and kindergarten programs necessary to prepare children for reading, writing, and math in the elementary grades?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

15. Should early childhood programs include developmental play as part of the curriculum?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

16. Do you have a parent partnership requirement for children enrolled in your Pre-K and kindergarten?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

17. Who assumes responsibility for parenting or parent partnerships in your district?
    [a] Early Childhood Coordinator
    [b] Chapter I Coordinator/Special Education Coordinator
    [c] Principal
    [d] Other
    [e] Unknown

18. Do you have printed materials available for parents describing your Pre-K and kindergarten programs?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

19. When one teacher works with three or four year-old children in the classroom, what should be the maximum pupil-teacher ratio?
    [a] less than 1:15 [b] 1:15 [c] 1:18 [d] 1:22 [e] Unknown/Other

20. When an aide works with a teacher in a three or four year-old children classroom, what should be the maximum pupil-teacher ratio?
    [a] Less Than 1:15 [b] 1:15 [c] 1:18 [d] 1:22 [e] Unknown/Other

21. Do you believe that teachers of early childhood (3, 4, and 5 year-olds) children should have special training?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

22. Which training program seems the most appropriate for early childhood teachers in your opinion?
    [a] Elementary Certification only
    [b] Elementary Certification Plus Early Childhood Training
    [c] Elementary Certification Plus Special Education Training
    [d] Special Education Certification Only
    [e] Unknown

23. Does your district have a director or contact person to coordinate your early/childhood education program?
    [a] Early Childhood Coordinator
    [b] Chapter 1 Coordinator/Special Education Coordinator
    [c] Principal
    [d] Other
    [e] Unknown

24. When you look at your early childhood classrooms do they seem to be organized around specific learning centers such as manipulatives, books, and housekeeping (as compared to traditional rows and organization)?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

25. Do you maintain a special list of substitute teachers for your early childhood classes?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

26. In general, describe the level of experience of the prekindergarten teachers in your district.
    [a] In their first year of teaching.
    [b] Less than five years experience.
    [c] More than five years experience.
    [d] Don't know.

27. Do you have an early childhood curriculum?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] In progress

28. Early childhood curriculum is best developed in your district by a curriculum committee or commercially produced?
    [a] District Written [b] Commercial [c] Combination a and b

29. Do you have a pre-K or kindergarten graduation in your district?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

30. Select the most important characteristic of a teacher of three, four, and five year-olds.
    [a] Loves kids [b] Creative [c] Enthusastic [d] Patience [e] Flexible

31. Should all early childhood programs (ages 3 and 4) be on a separate campus?
    [a] Yes [b] No [c] Uncertain

32. Developmental play in your school most nearly resembles which of the following:
    [a] Teacher Directed Games [c] Children Interacting in Centers (house, store, etc.)
    [b] Recess [d] Physical Education Class

Please return the Scantron Form only to the Teacher Education Center
in the attached self-addressed postage-paid envelope by October 15, 1990.
Thank you for your assistance.

Copies of this study will be made available upon written request.

Primary preparers of the survey instrument are
Dr. Jerry McGee
Dr. David Henderson
Dr. Laverne Warner
of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. 9/90